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INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS TO FOLLOW UP THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

High-level Advisory Board on Sustainable Development

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, in paragraph 38.18 of Agenda 21, 1/ stated that intergovernmental bodies, the Secretary-General and the United Nations system as a whole may also benefit from the expertise of a high-level advisory board consisting of eminent persons knowledgeable about environment and development, including relevant sciences, appointed by the Secretary-General in their personal capacity. In this context, the Secretary-General was requested to make appropriate recommendations to the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session.

2. In his report (A/47/598 and Add.1) on institutional arrangements to follow up the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the Secretary-General presented his views on the functioning and responsibilities of the Board. In its resolution 47/191 of 22 December 1992, the General Assembly endorsed the view of the Secretary-General that the High-level Advisory Board should consist of eminent personalities broadly representative of all regions of the world, with recognized expertise on the broad spectrum of issues to be dealt with by the Commission on Sustainable Development, drawn from relevant scientific disciplines, industry, finance and other major non-governmental constituencies, as well as various disciplines related to environment and development, and that due account should also be given to gender balance. Furthermore, the Assembly decided that the main task of this Board was to give broad consideration to issues related to implementation of Agenda 21, taking into account the thematic multi-year programme of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and provide expert advice in that

regard to the Secretary-General and, through him, to the Commission, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly.

3. In paragraph 60 of his report, mentioned above, the Secretary-General noted that the areas covered in the work of the existing Committee for Development Planning and the type of expertise available in its membership were potentially similar to those of the High-level Advisory Board and proposed that a single body should be established to provide high-level advice on all questions relating to environment and development. The Assembly took note of the views of the Secretary-General in this regard, and requested him to submit appropriate proposals to the Economic and Social Council at its organizational session for 1993, including the possibility of organizing expert rosters.

4. Pursuant to the provisions of the General Assembly resolution referred to above, the Secretary-General intends to set up in the near future a High-level Advisory Board on Sustainable Development, consisting of 15 to 25 internationally recognized personalities to be appointed by him in their personal capacity. The Board would meet for a period of two to three days in advance of the sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development. Members of the Board might also, at the request of the Commission, take part in its sessions, particularly its high-level meeting. Members of the Board would be nominated for a period of two years - with a Chairperson and a Vice-Chairperson to be elected by the Board itself on a rotating basis. The Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development would act as its Executive Secretary.

5. The Board will serve as a high-level source of advice for the Secretary-General in formulating policy proposals, elaborating innovative approaches and courses for action, and identifying emerging issues to be brought to the attention of relevant intergovernmental bodies, particularly the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Economic and Social Council, including the high-level segments of these bodies, as well as to the attention of the Administrative Committee on Coordination. The Board's deliberations might be based on conceptual papers prepared by the United Nations Secretariat and, as appropriate, input from ad hoc meetings of experts organized by the Secretary-General and/or held upon request of the Commission on Sustainable Development or the Economic and Social Council (see also paras. 11-12 below).

6. In more specific terms, the Board would have the following functions:

(a) To provide high-level advice, proposals and recommendations on issues and themes to be addressed by the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Commission's high-level meetings;

(b) To bring to the attention of the Secretary-General and, through him, to that of the relevant intergovernmental bodies, emerging problems related to sustainable development and possible ways and means for resolving them;

(c) To provide the Secretary-General and, through him, the Administrative Committee on Coordination, with its views on the expectations and concerns of major constituencies and groups on sustainable development issues and on the contribution of the United Nations system in addressing those issues;

(d) To contribute to the building of partnerships between the United Nations and the scientific, business and academic communities and major non-governmental groups;

(e) To promote knowledge and understanding of and mobilize support for United Nations activities in the area of environment and development throughout the constituencies and groups represented by its members.

7. Generally, the agenda for the meetings of the Board would be related to the multi-year thematic programme of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development. At the same time, should there occur, during inter-sessional periods, major developments that might have a significant impact on international cooperation in the area of environment and development, the Secretary-General could propose adjustments to the Board's agenda to ensure the forward-looking nature of its deliberations. Moreover, should such developments require the urgent attention of intergovernmental bodies, the Secretary-General could call special meetings of the Board to elicit its views for their consideration. The views of the Board would be conveyed to the Commission on Sustainable Development and other relevant intergovernmental bodies in the form of information notes and/or annexes to reports of the Secretary-General.

8. The Secretary-General notes that the mandate of the Committee for Development Planning, whose functions are to be subsumed under those of the High-level Advisory Board, has evolved over the years from provision of assistance to the Economic and Social Council in evaluating United Nations activities relating to economic planning and programming towards consideration of world development trends and prospects and formulation of recommendations in the areas of development and international economic and financial cooperation. Indeed, over the past few years, it had been suggested within the Committee for Development Planning itself that there was need for strengthening the capacity of its membership to deal with sustainable development issues. The Secretary-General also recognizes that issues related to implementation of Agenda 21 are extremely broad and may necessitate specialized expert advice which the Board, given the high level and limited composition of its membership, may not always be able to provide on its own. He notes further that the functions of the Board, as outlined in paragraphs 6 and 7 above, extend beyond the provision of expert advice strictly speaking.

9. In order for the Board, as well as the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Economic and Social Council, to avail themselves of such technical expert advice as may be necessary on the wide array of issues falling within their competence, the Secretary-General proposes to establish a roster - drawing, as appropriate, from existing rosters held by organizations

of the United Nations system, including the Committee for Development Planning - of experts with recognized competence in the scientific and technical areas involved. In order to encompass as broad a spectrum as possible of the relevant expertise and knowledge available throughout the world, such a roster or rosters would be flexible and open-ended in nature. The composition of the roster could be reviewed on a biennial basis to ensure that available expertise corresponds to the needs and requirements of the High-level Advisory Board and the Commission on Sustainable Development. In establishing and maintaining the roster and a liaison with the experts placed thereon, the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat will cooperate closely with other parts of the Secretariat.

10. Such a roster would thus reflect the complex and multidisciplinary nature of issues to be addressed in the course of the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Moreover, experts on the roster (some of whom might be former members of the Committee for Development Planning whose term expired on 31 December 1992) could be effectively called upon to provide competent advice on the general economic and development issues currently addressed within the Committee for Development Planning. The current functions of the Committee for Development Planning related to criteria for identifying least developed countries might be assigned, as the need may arise and upon request of ECOSOC, to ad hoc meetings of competent experts on the roster taking into account the experience gained and procedures used in this regard within the context of the Committee for Development Planning.

11. Consultations with the experts on the roster, for the purpose of exploring pressing and/or emerging problems and elaborating proposals on innovative and practical approaches to resolving them, taking into account the multi-year thematic programme of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development, could be organized in a flexible manner, depending on the nature of a particular issue, through either correspondence or, as the need arose, small ad hoc expert group meetings. Such a flexible approach would provide significant advantages in terms of mobilizing expeditiously and economically the expertise that may be required for purposes of follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

12. If the need arose to obtain expert scientific or technical advice on a particular theme or issue to be addressed by the Commission in accordance with its programme of work, the Secretary-General could organize small ad hoc working groups drawing upon the expertise of those placed on the roster in order to prepare relevant studies or research papers. The studies or papers could then be presented by the chairpersons of those working groups to the High-level Advisory Board with a view to assisting it in its deliberations. Furthermore, the Commission on Sustainable Development and/or the Economic and Social Council could directly request experts on the roster to prepare studies and analytical reports on particular matters or to set up small ad hoc advisory groups or panels for specific purposes drawing from the expertise on the roster.

Notes

1/ See "Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992" (A/CONF.151/26), vol. III.